

Virtual and on-line learning through the pandemic – the experience of Community Children’s Nurses

- On 30th January 2020, the first two cases of COVID-19 in the United Kingdom (UK) were confirmed – a mother and son, Chinese nationals staying in a hotel in York (BBC News, 2020a).
- The first UK death from COVID occurred on March 5th (BBC News, 2020b).
- By the 18th March 2020, there were just over 100 deaths and the UK government announced that all nurseries, schools and colleges were to be closed to pupils within 2 days (BBC News, 2020c).
- By the end of that week, most UK Universities had confirmed the suspension of all face-to-face teaching.

- On the advice of the Director of Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council the University of Hertfordshire suspended face-to-face teaching on March 14th, 2020, to ensure the safety of students, staff and the wider community.
- Nine days later, following a formal closure, to support staff in preparing the necessary teaching materials, the university transitioned to online learning (Price, 2020).

- The **Community Children's Nursing** programme is one of three programmes - alongside District Nursing and General Practice Nursing that comprise the Specialist Practitioner Qualification.
- The programmes are delivered full-time over a full academic year 52 weeks (with part-time option over two years). The Nursing and Midwifery Council which approves these programmes requires that learning outcomes are achieved both in theory and in practice.
- In the closing weeks of the second semester of academic year 2019/20 the 'Specialist Practice in Community Nursing' students who had previously been attending face-to-face lectures on campus, received their remaining teaching online through a combination of:
 - short 30-minute Zoom sessions,
 - pre-recorded narrated PowerPoint recordings and
 - alternative e-learning resources made available through the universities virtual learning environment Studynet (Canvas).

- With support from Practice Supervisors, Practice Assessors and employing NHS organisations alongside the national support of NHS Health Education it was agreed that despite the highly challenging and demanding circumstances presented by COVID, the CCN students (alongside DN and GPN colleagues) should continue with their clinical placements and complete their programme on time.
- The hope was that all would return to *'normal'* in preparation for the next programme commencing in September 2020 – three short months away.
- In late August 2020 the Universities and Colleges Union warned of an *"avalanche"* of COVID cases if students returned to the classrooms and advised this should be delayed until Christmas(BBC News, 2020d).
- On 28th September the BBC reported that around 40 Universities had reported positive COVID cases within days of the start of the academic year (BBC News 2020e).

- Prior to the pandemic there had been a steady expansion in the use of technology to support learning (Gregg and Shin, 2021) including:
 - Distance learning
 - On-line learning
 - Video/tele-conferencing
- As a result of concerns about the aerosol transmission of COVID HEIs recognised the need to provide teaching/learning that did not require face-to-face contact.
- This required the investment of significant sums of money at-pace into the development of IT infrastructures that would support alternative means of programme delivery (Al Maskari et al 2022).

- For programmes such as the Community Children's Nursing Specialist Practitioner programme, there were a number of additional factors to consider including:
- The taught content of the programme included a number of components whose delivery was predicated upon specific face-to-face delivery:
 - Non-medical prescribing which includes practical assessments of students in a prescribing role
 - Objective Structured Clinical Examination – OSCEs
- Nursing and Midwifery Council requirement did not change: learning outcomes for the programme are to be achieved both in theory and in practice and will continue to be predicated upon a 50:50 split between University and Practice Placements

- The University of Hertfordshire introduced Community Children's Nursing specialist practitioner programme in 1995 – enrolling between 1 and 6 students per year between 1995 and 2019.
- At the start of 2020 academic year due to the Coronavirus Pandemic in 2019 it was not possible to offer face to face teaching.
- Following a consultation with NHS provider trusts in the east of England and London regions the content structure of the programme was reviewed and developed for delivery as online and virtual learning.
- Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, there was an increase in student attending the Community Children's Nursing Programme.
- In September 2020 11 students commenced the programme and in September 2021 there was an increase to 14 students attending the programme.
- The students were from a wider geographical area Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn NHS Foundation Trust and Norfolk Community Health Care NHS Trust.

Practicalities of teaching online and what happens now.

- Learning how to use Zoom, Microsoft Teams and technology resources such as menti-meter, breakout rooms, screen sharing, padlett etc.
- Online learning etiquette – correctly dressed, pets, children, private conversations.
- Traveling into the University from London, Kings Lynn and Norfolk.
- Students wanting a blended approach but have other responsibilities as well as needing more time to organise caring responsibilities of
 - pets,
 - children,
 - parents etc.

Research Study

The overall aim of the research was:

- **To ascertain the views and experiences of students undertaking the CCN programme during the academic year 2020-2021.**
- We were keen to discover how other Universities responded to the “crisis”
- What technology were they using? What software worked best to support on-line learning?
- What new skills did the lecturing staff need to develop?
- What about equity/fairness for the students? Could they upload the required software, did they have the hardware?

Research Study

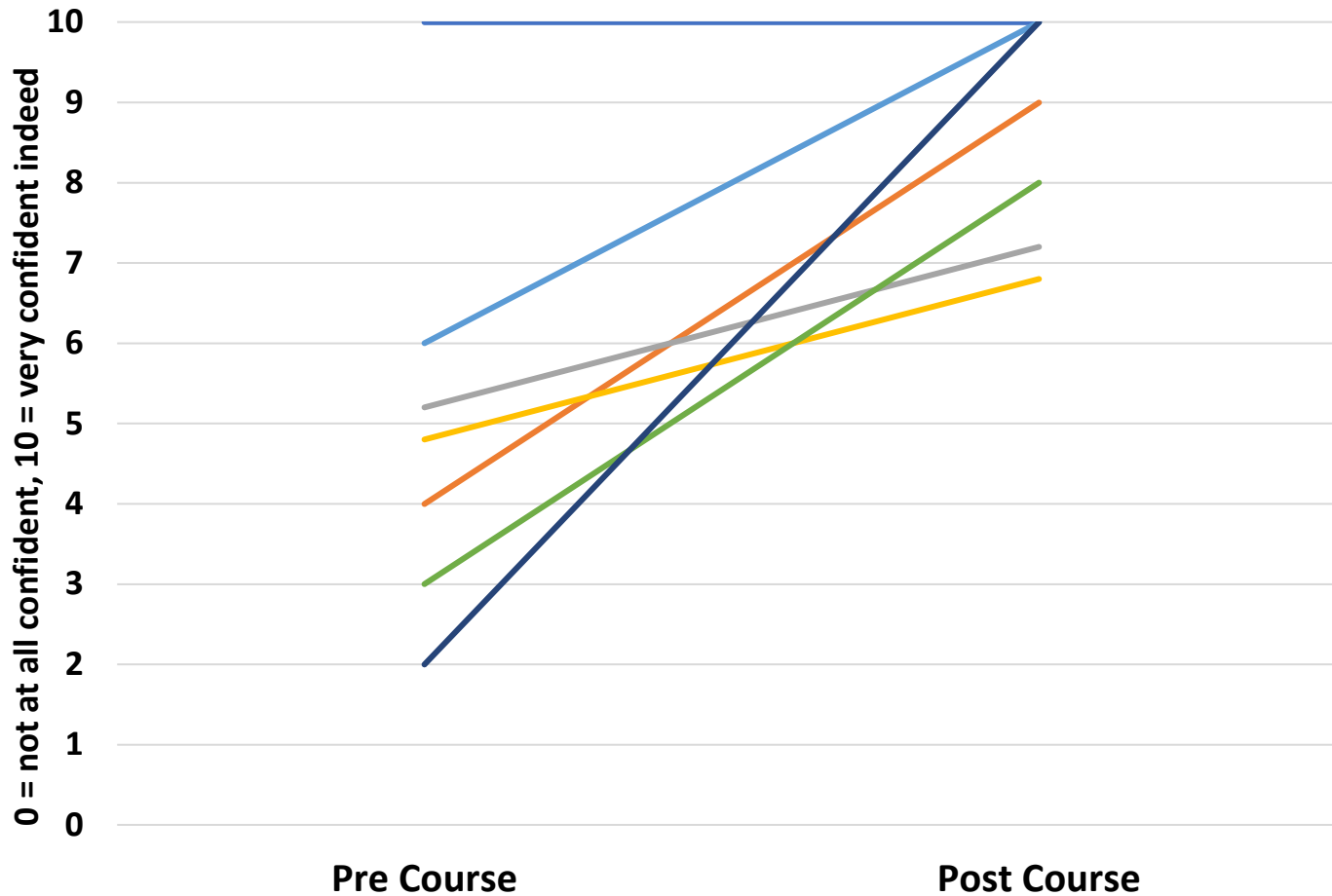
Research approach

- The research involved a survey of students (n = 28) at three UK universities – UH, Liverpool John Moores and University of Surrey
- Survey questionnaires were distributed to participants and returned to the study Chief Investigator (MW) by email.
- The survey, which consisted both Likert scale and free text questions was completed anonymously in students' own time
- 7 surveys were returned – 25% response rate 😞 (despite two reminder emails to all participants – and gentle nudges from the programme leads).
- Programme Leads at each HEI provided additional background information about how their University rose to the challenge of delivering an on-line/virtual/hybrid programme.

Liverpool John Moores University

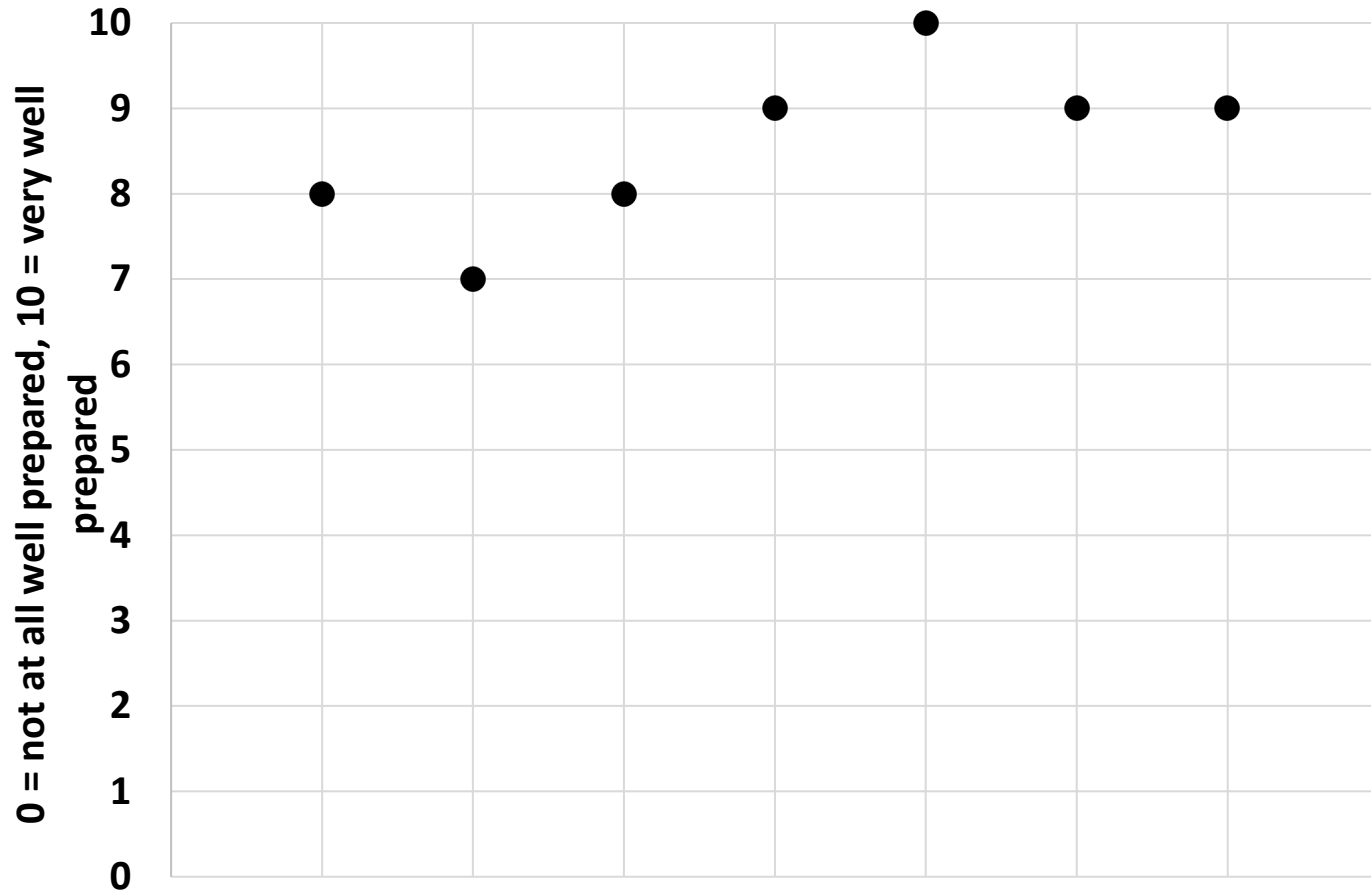
- Liverpool John Moores University has delivered Specialist Practitioner Programme for Community Children's Nurses (CCN) programme for 9 years, they have an average of 4 students from across Northwest England.
- In March 2020, students were unable to access face to face teaching, like all other universities across the UK.
- The university system did not support online teaching; therefore, all remaining sessions were pre-recorded using Panopto and students were asked to complete the session at a time that suited them.
- For the V300 nurse prescribing students feedback was that the found pre-recording Panopto was useful, however, the negative feedback was there was a lack of opportunity for live discussion and debate and an inability to analyse, question, further clarify points being made.
- In 2021 the university was more creative and interactive using zoom as an online learning platform.
- Initially zoom was challenging for academics and students and students alike.

- The University of Surrey has delivered Specialist Practitioner Programme for Community Children's Nurses (CCN) programme since the early 2000's. The cohort has increased since then and the largest cohort of 13 students were recorded in September 2019.
- In March 2020 the national lockdown was announced, most students had completed the taught elements of the programme. SurreyLearn the online platform which Surrey use was established with Panopto, however, online platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams was a new teaching experience.
- Overall online teaching worked well, students feedback were, they missed face to face sessions, which enable more natural and personalised approach to learning.
- Students missed the opportunity to meet with peers, although they did welcome the benefits of saving fuel and time traveling time from University.



Individual student ratings

“How would you rate your confidence in using video and on-line technology?”



Individual student ratings.

"How well has the course prepared you for your role as a CCN?"

"It was better learning at home and in my own space" (CCNS2)

"Using online technology has been very convenient and time saving, as I have not had to travel for lectures" (CCNS1)

It was hard to "understand how other teams all operate" (CCNS3)

What did the students say about their experience of virtual and on-line learning?

"Break out rooms were good but I felt that general 'chatting' and idea-sharing following sessions was missed" (CCNS 5)

"During the second year I felt more isolated as I didn't get to spend much time with the rest of the cohort" (CCNS7)

"I feel more confidence in carrying out presentations and training via video technology" (CCNS6)

"It was obvious that many students were not participating or listening to the lectures at all" (CCNS4)

Currently at UH

- Owl which allows some students to be at home and others in the lecture room.
- Students are given the choice if they wish to be face to face or online. As some students have informed us that they would like to be face to face.
- It gives the students the opportunity to meet each other, which was one of the challenges of online learning.
- Also, if a student has an issue such as childcare responsibilities they can change to online.
- Some lectures need to be face to face, such as the physical assessment session which helps students to develop their advance assessment skills.
- Emotive lectures are face to face as it gives both the lecturer and the student a chance to observe students interactions.
- Timetable of when the students are face to face and online are given in advance so the students can plan for the session.

The Study Team

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